

No.197

The Rainbow Prince

TWO FOLK TALES FROM BENGAL

Children love to hear stories—so do adults, if the story has relevance to their lives. It is this love which has kept alive for generations stories that have been handed down by an oral tradition.

Every time a story is retold it acquires a new colour and a new dimension. The grandmother who heard a story as a little girl from her grandmother will relish telling it to her grandchildren. A traveller from a distant land, who happens to hear a story during his journey, will later tell it to his own people, modifying it or adding to it little details to suit the change of place and context. This is how stories travel from one part of the world to another and why some stories of Aesop and Vishnu Sharma who wrote the Panchatantra, have much in common.

This Amar Chitra Katha retells two folk tales popular in Bengal.

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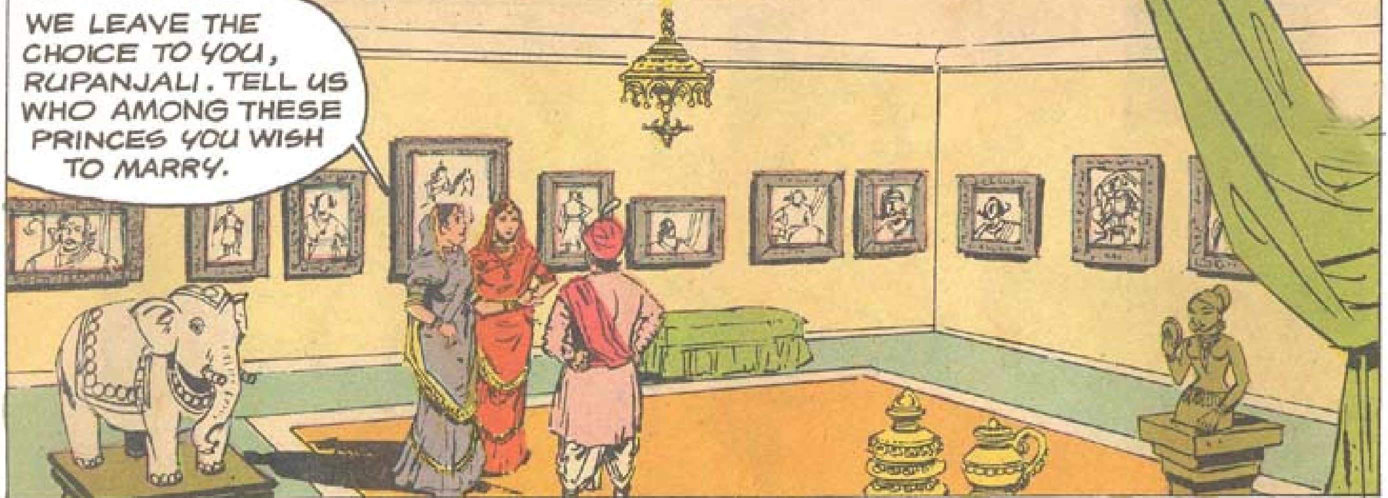
BUT HER MOTHER, THE QUEEN, WAS WORRIED.

WHERE WILL WE FIND A PRINCE GOOD ENOUGH FOR OUR DARLING DAUGHTER?

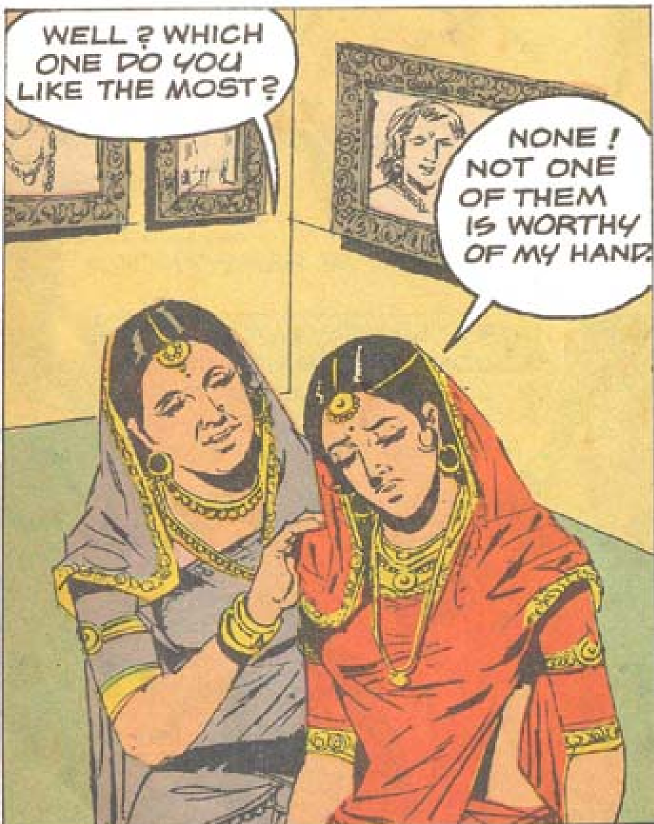
MY BARDS WILL FIND HER A HANDSOME PRINCE.

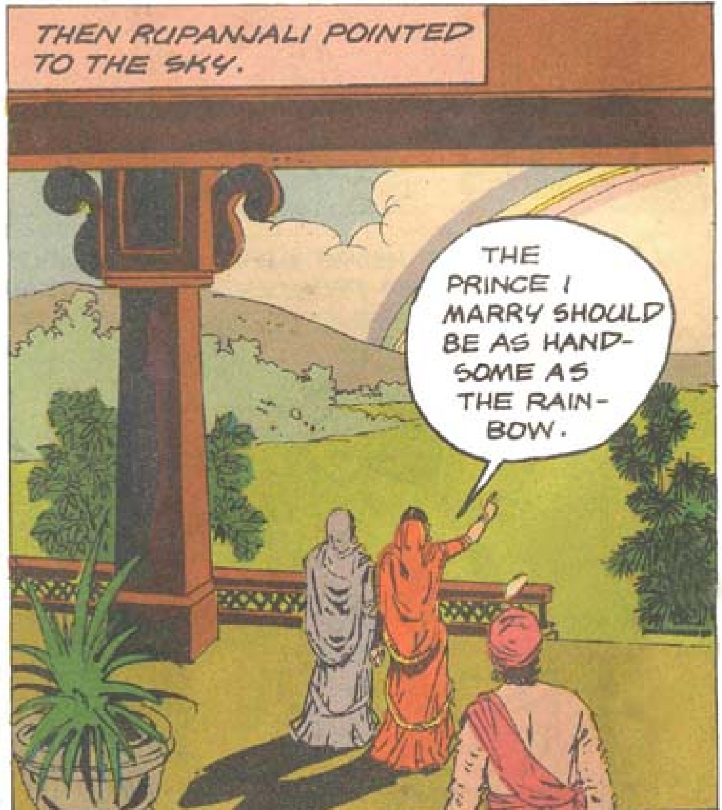
SO THE BARDS WERE SENT TO KINGDOMS NEAR AND FAR IN SEARCH OF A MATCH FOR THEIR PRINCESS. WHEN THEY RETURNED —

YOUR MAJESTY, WE HAVE BROUGHT PORTRAITS OF THE MOST HANDSOME OF THE PRINCES WE SAW. LET THE PRINCESS CHOOSE FROM THEM.


THE PICTURES WERE HUNG UP IN THE PALACE ART GALLERY AND THE KING AND QUEEN TOOK RUPANJALI THERE.
WE LEAVE THE CHOICE TO YOU, RUPANJALI. TELL US WHO AMONG THESE PRINCES YOU WISH TO MARRY.


RUPANJALI WALKED AROUND THE GALLERY.


WELL? WHICH ONE DO YOU LIKE THE MOST?
NONE! NOT ONE OF THEM IS WORTHY OF MY HAND.


THEN RUPANJALI POINTED TO THE SKY.
THE PRINCE I MARRY SHOULD BE AS HAND-SOME AS THE RAIN-BOW.

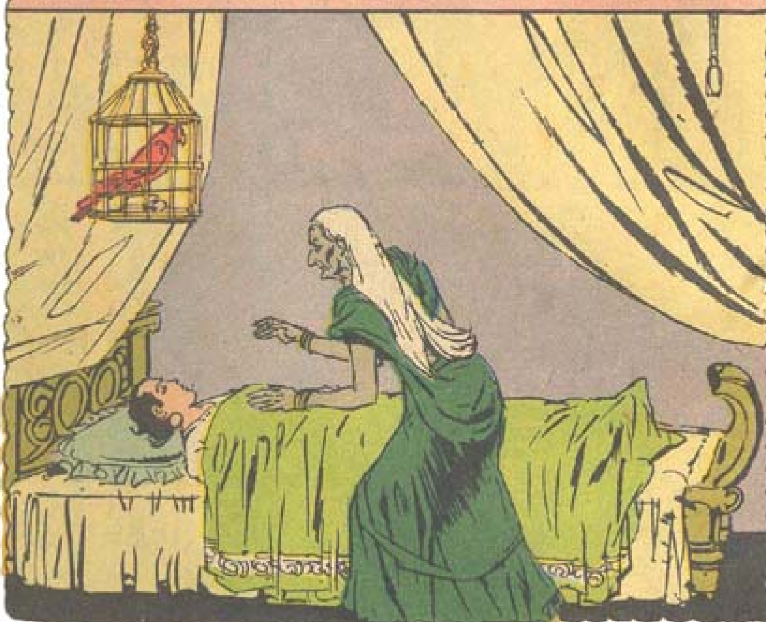

THE NEXT MORNING A STRANGER APPEARED IN THE CITY.
HOW EXQUISITE HIS MUSIC IS!
WHERE IS HE FROM?

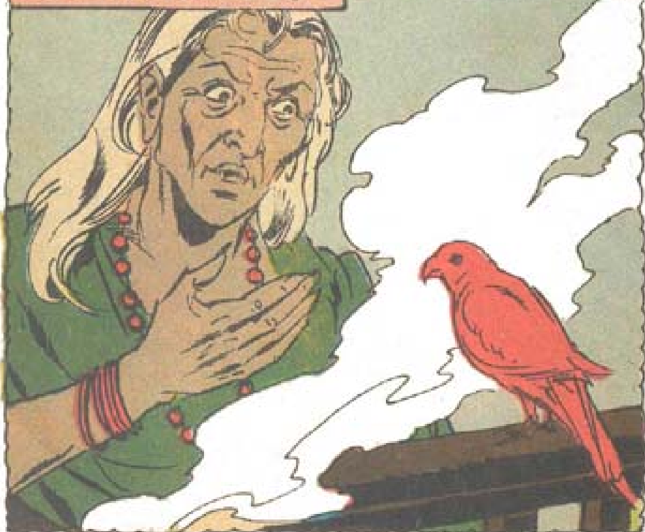

THE STRANGER WENT STRAIGHT TO THE PALACE.
O KING, I COME FROM THE LAND OF THE RAINBOW. I HAVE BEEN LOOK-ING FOR A BRIDE WORTHY OF OUR PRINCE. I HAVE JUST HEARD OF PRINCESS RUPANJALI AND HAVE COME WITH A MAR-RIAGE PROPOSAL.


THE KING GOT UP FROM HIS THRONE TO GREET THE STRANGER.
MY HEARTIEST WEL-COME TO YOU. THIS IS INDEED A FORTUNATE DAY FOR MY DAUGHTER. I AM HAPPY TO ACCEPT YOUR OFFER.


WAIT! BEFORE YOU DO, THERE IS ONE THING I MUST TELL YOU. SOME TIME AGO . . .


". . . A WICKED OLD WITCH CAME TO OUR LAND . . ."


". . . AND CAST A SPELL ON OUR PRINCE WHICH PUT HIM TO SLEEP FOR A LONG TIME."


" THEN SHE BREATHED THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PRINCE INTO A BLOOD-RED PARROT . . ."


". . . AND LET THE BIRD FLY AWAY."


OUR PRINCE WILL NOT AWAKE UNTIL THE RED PARROT IS FOUND.


THE KING WAS DISMAYED.
HOW CAN I MARRY MY ONLY DAUGHTER TO A PRINCE WHO MAY NEVER WAKE UP AGAIN?


WHEN THE NEWS REACHED RUPANJALI, HOWEVER —
I WILL MARRY NO ONE BUT THE RAINBOW PRINCE. AND HE MUST BE AROUSED FROM HIS SLEEP. SO I MUST HAVE THE RED PARROT.
BUT, MY CHILD, WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE IT HAS FLOWN AWAY.


RUPANJALI STAMPED HER FOOT IMPATIENTLY.
EVERY SINGLE BIRD IN THE KINGDOM MUST BE CAUGHT. YOU ARE CERTAIN TO FIND THE RED PARROT AMONG THEM.

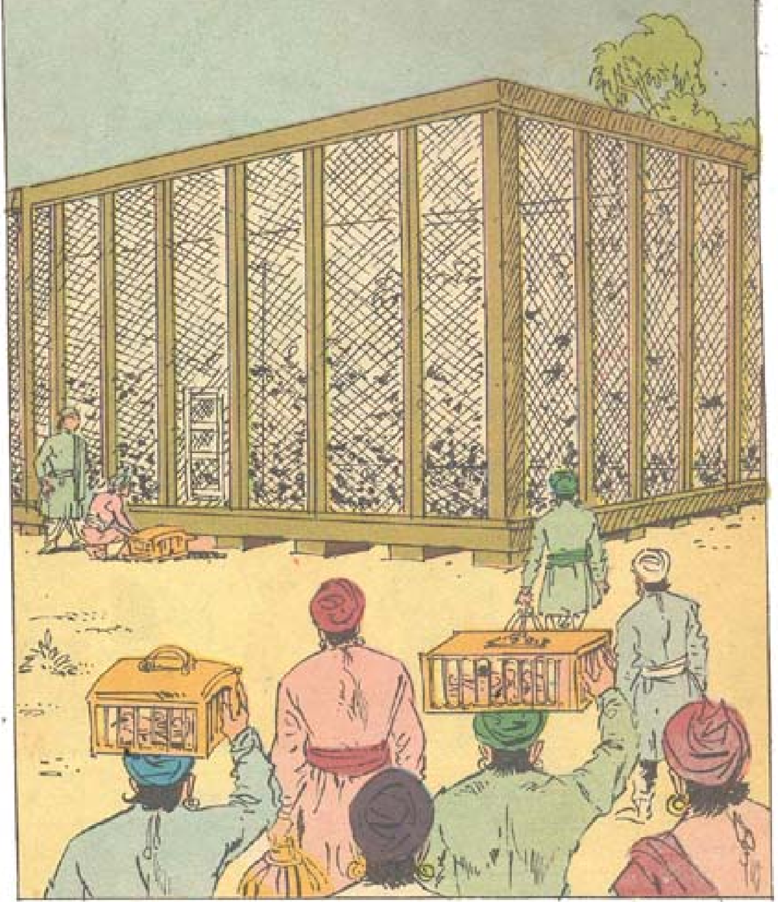

THE KING WAS SHOCKED.
BUT WE CAN'T DO THAT, CHILD. IT WOULD BE CRUEL.
I DON'T CARE. IF YOU LOVE ME, FATHER, YOU WILL DO IT.

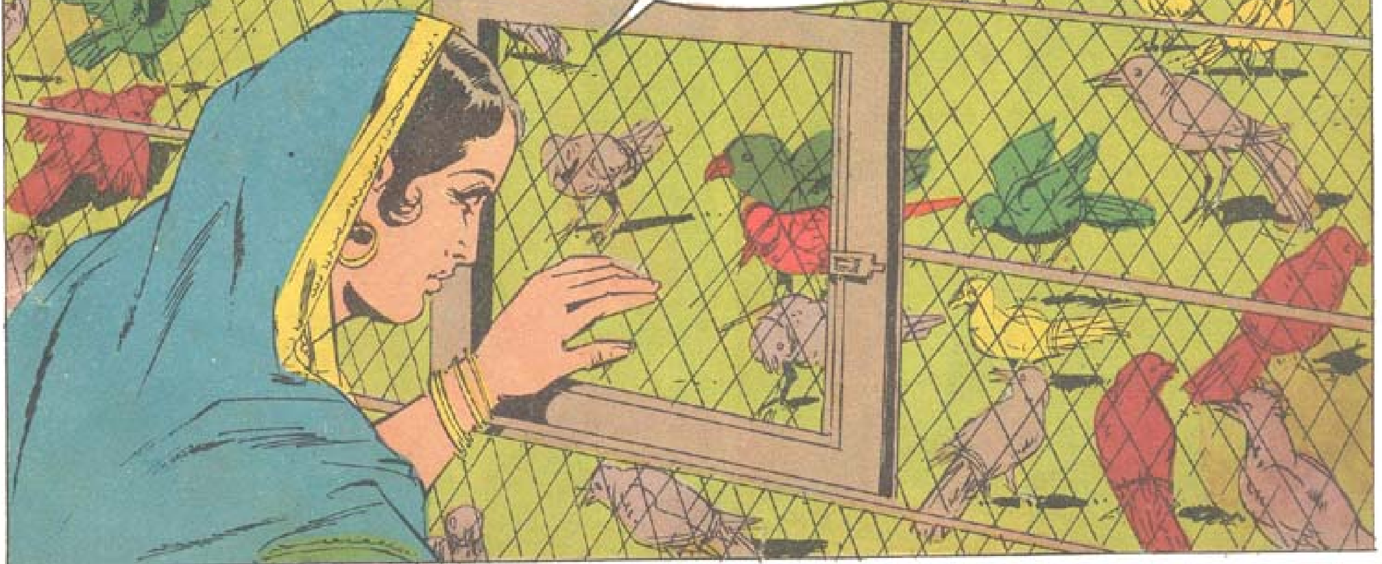

AND REMEMBER — NOT A SINGLE BIRD SHOULD ESCAPE.
ALL RIGHT, MY CHILD.


THE NEXT DAY, ORDERS WERE SENT OUT FOR ALL BIRDS TO BE TRAPPED.


SOON THE NESTS BECAME EMPTY.


THE HAPPY CHIRPING OF BIRDS NO LONGER FILLED THE AIR.


A SPECIAL CAGE WAS ERECTED FOR THE BIRDS. THERE WERE MILLIONS OF THEM. THE ENTIRE CAGE ECHOED AND RE-ECHOED WITH THEIR HEARTBROKEN, FRIGHTENED CRIES.


NILANJANA, RUPANJALI'S MAID, HEARD THE CRIES—
MY POOR DEARS, I WILL GO TO THE PRINCESS AND PLEAD FOR YOU. SHE IS KIND AND GENTLE. SHE WILL SET YOU FREE.

NILANJANA WENT TO THE PRINCESS TO PLEAD FOR THE BIRDS.

OH KIND PRINCESS, SET THE POOR BIRDS FREE! DON'T YOU SEE HOW WRETCHED THEY ARE?

RUPANJALI FLEW INTO A RAGE.

HOW DARE YOU QUESTION MY ACTIONS, YOU WRETCH!

NILANJANA WAS SHOCKED TO SEE THE CHANGE THAT HAD COME OVER HER PRINCESS.

THIS IS NOT THE PRINCESS I ADMIRED! THIS IS NOT THE GENTLE RUPANJALI WHOSE SMILE HELD THE COLOURS OF THE RAINBOW.

NILANJANA TRIED AGAIN.

DEAR PRINCESS, HOW CAN YOU FIND YOUR LIFE'S HAPPINESS AT THE COST OF SUCH PAIN TO THE POOR CREATURES? SET THEM FREE.

RUPANJALI'S EYES FLASHED DANGEROUSLY.

WELL-SPOKEN, MERCIFUL ONE! YOU LOVE THOSE BIRDS, DON'T YOU?

YES, PRINCESS. MY HEART GOES OUT TO THEM.

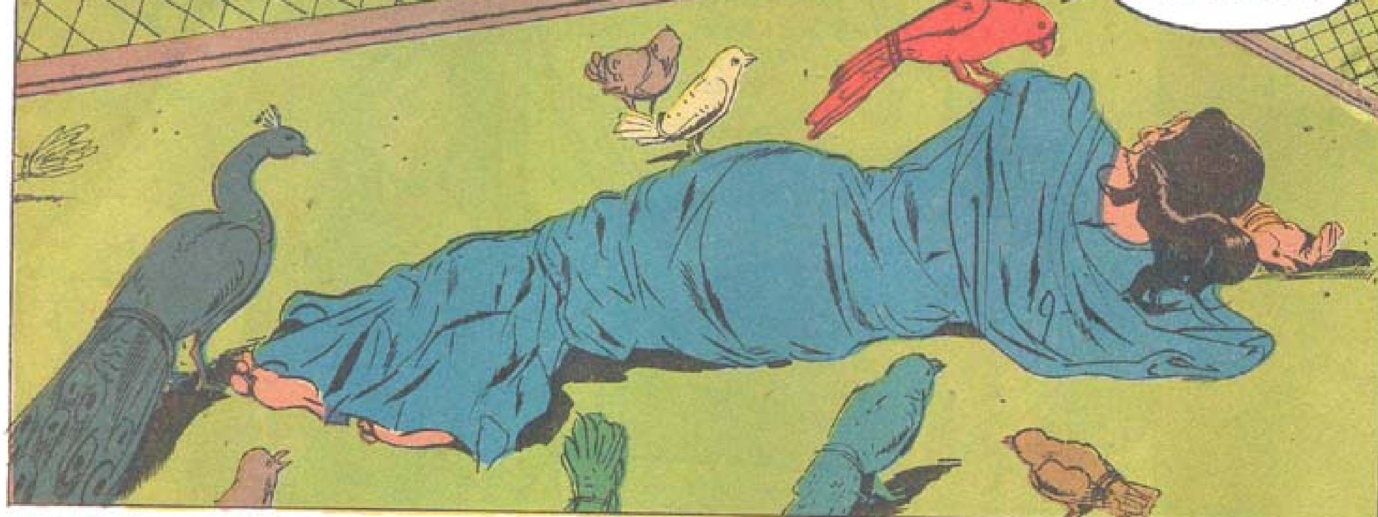
RUPANJALI TURNED TO THE GUARDS.

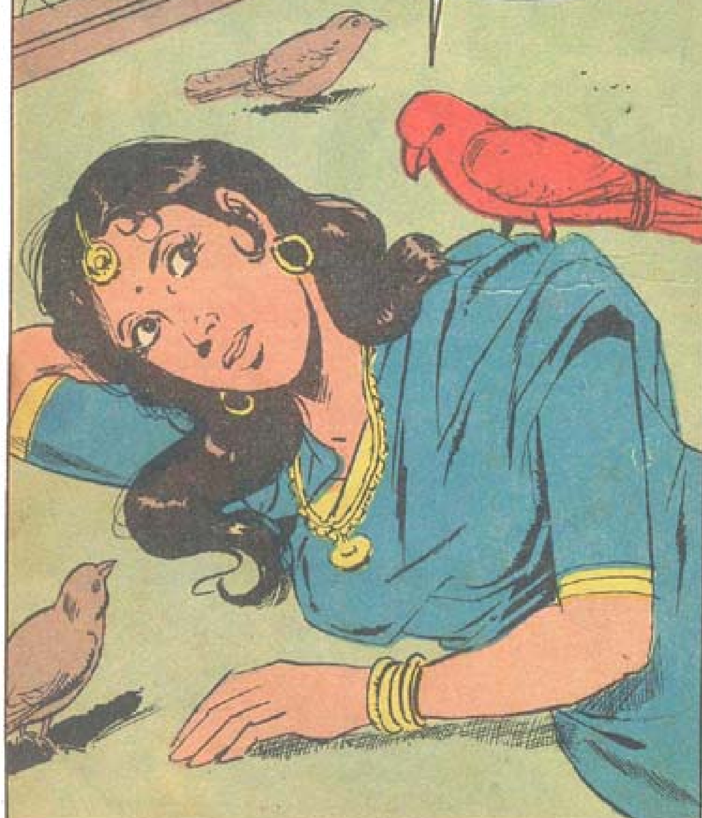
THROW HER INTO THE CAGE. LET HER BE IN THE COMPANY OF THE BIRDS SHE LOVES SO MUCH!

AS NILANJANA WAS TAKEN AWAY —

I MUST FIND OUT WHETHER THE RED PARROT IS AMONG THE BIRDS CAUGHT.

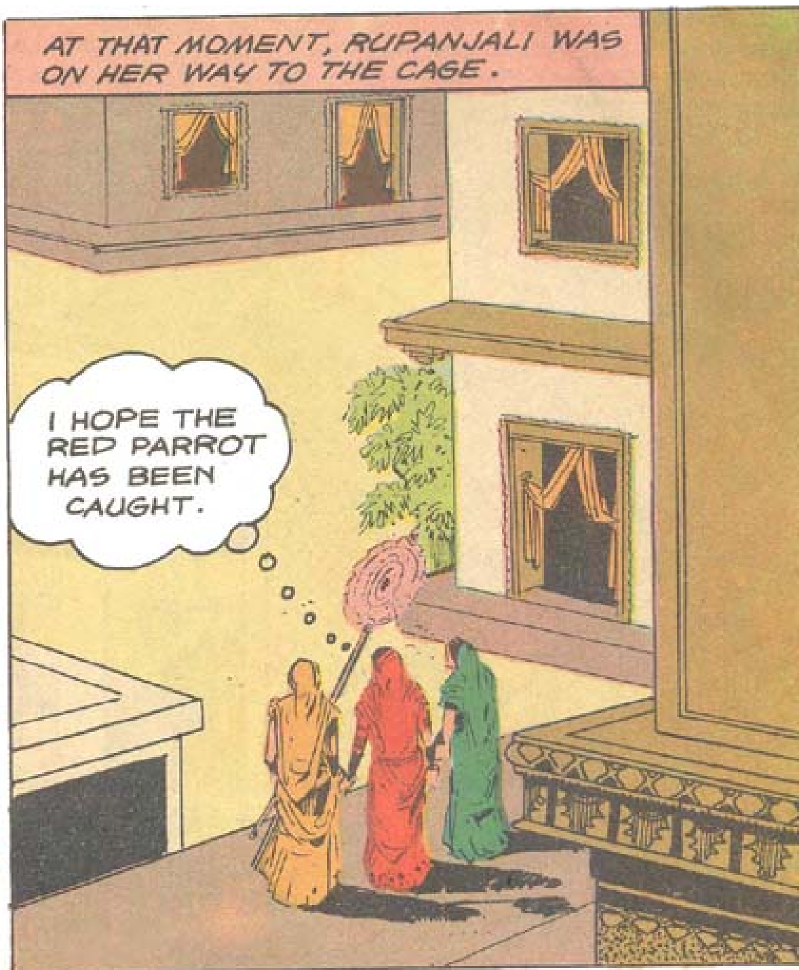



A LITTLE WHILE LATER —
NILANJANA ! WAKE UP, NILANJANA !

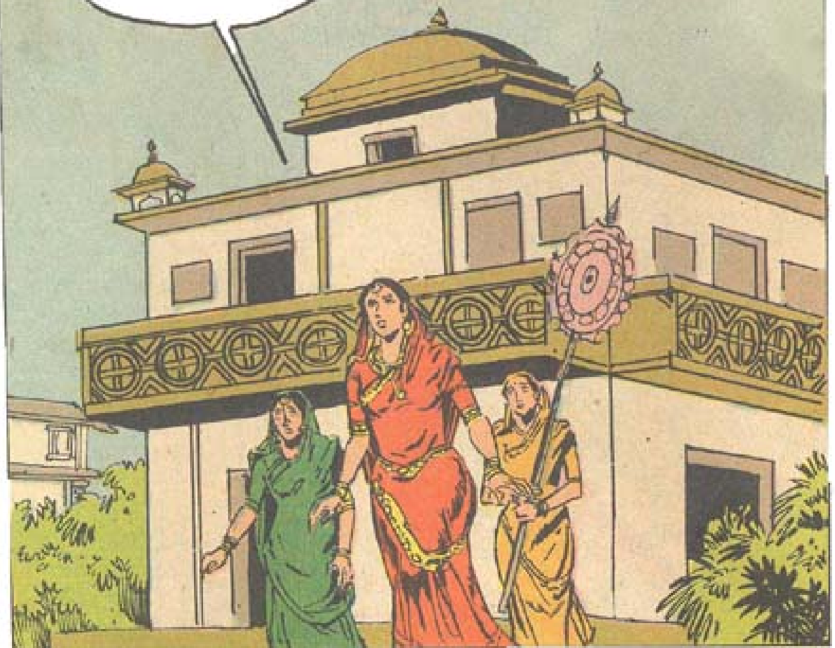
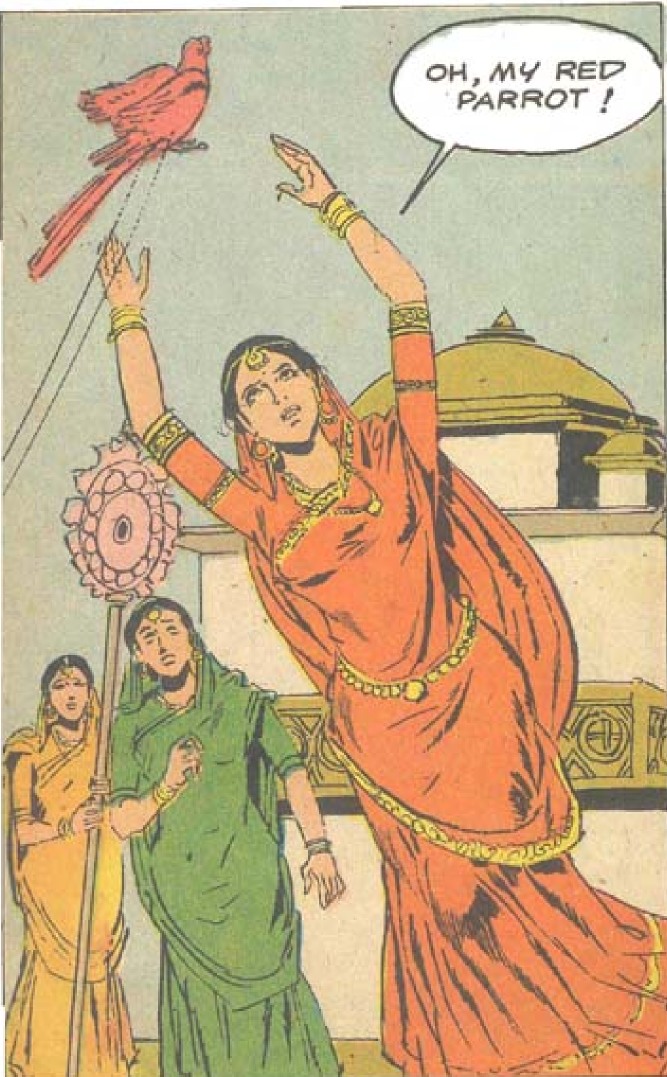

NILANJANA OPENED HER EYES TO FIND A RED PARROT SPEAKING TO HER.
SET ME FREE, NILANJANA. JUST SEE HOW THE THREAD HAS BRUISED MY WINGS. HOW CRUEL YOU HUMAN BEINGS ARE !


NILANJANA GENTLY TOOK THE BIRD INTO HER HANDS.
POOR LITTLE ONE ! HOW YOU HAVE SUFFERED!


I WILL CUT THE THREAD AND SET YOU FREE. I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO ME.


AT THAT MOMENT, RUPANJALI WAS ON HER WAY TO THE CAGE.
I HOPE THE RED PARROT HAS BEEN CAUGHT.

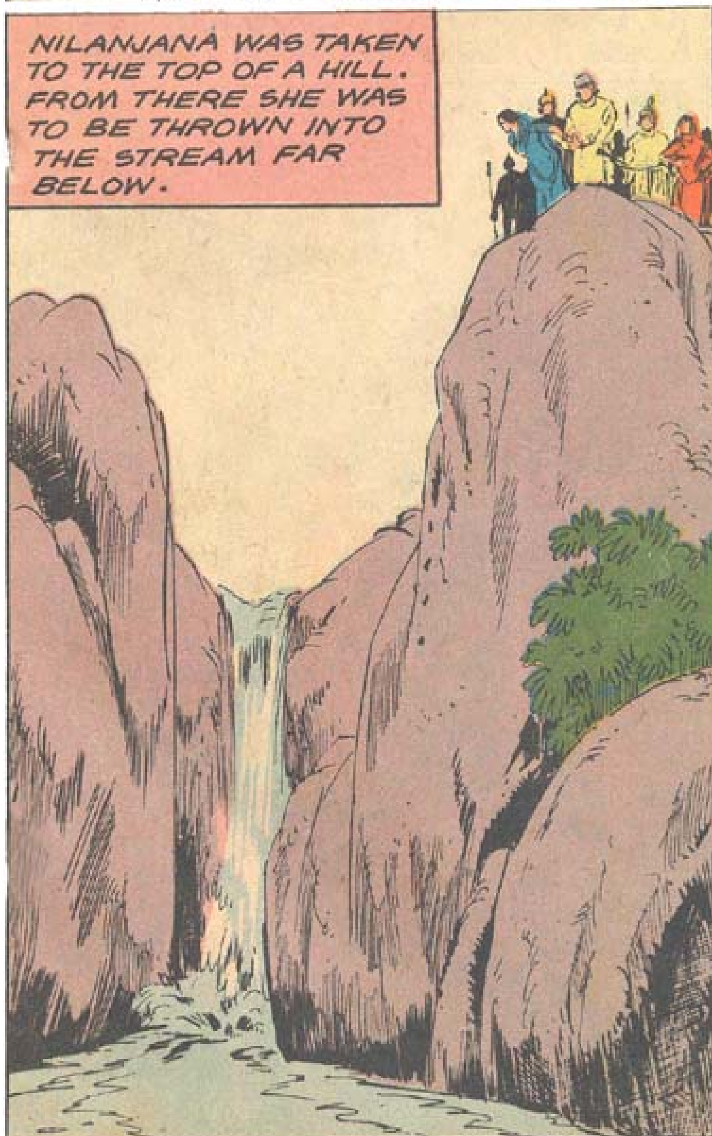
IT'S THE RED PARROT! NILANJANA HAS FOUND THE BIRD!


MEANWHILE, NILANJANA RELEASED THE BIRD—

NILANJANA! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

OH, MY RED PARROT!

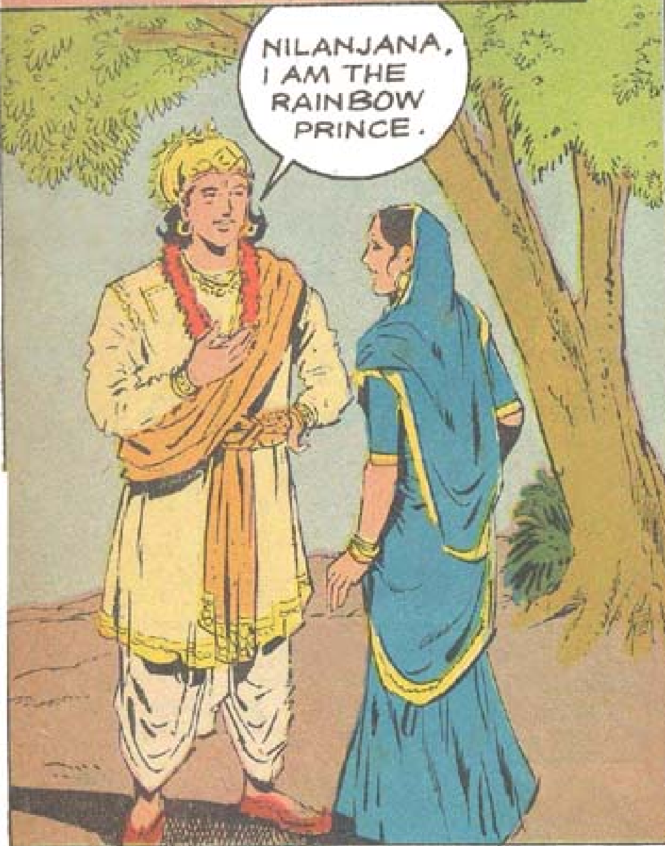
YOU WICKED GIRL! YOU HAVE SET MY PARROT FREE! YOU SHALL DIE FOR THIS!


I ONLY SAW HOW IT SUFFERED. I KNOW IT WOULD HAVE DIED IF I HAD NOT SET IT FREE.


THE TEARS AND PLEAS OF HER MAID LEFT RUPANJALI UNMOVED.
YOU RELEASED THE PARROT AND YOU MUST DIE!


NILANJANA WAS TAKEN TO THE TOP OF A HILL. FROM THERE SHE WAS TO BE THROWN INTO THE STREAM FAR BELOW.

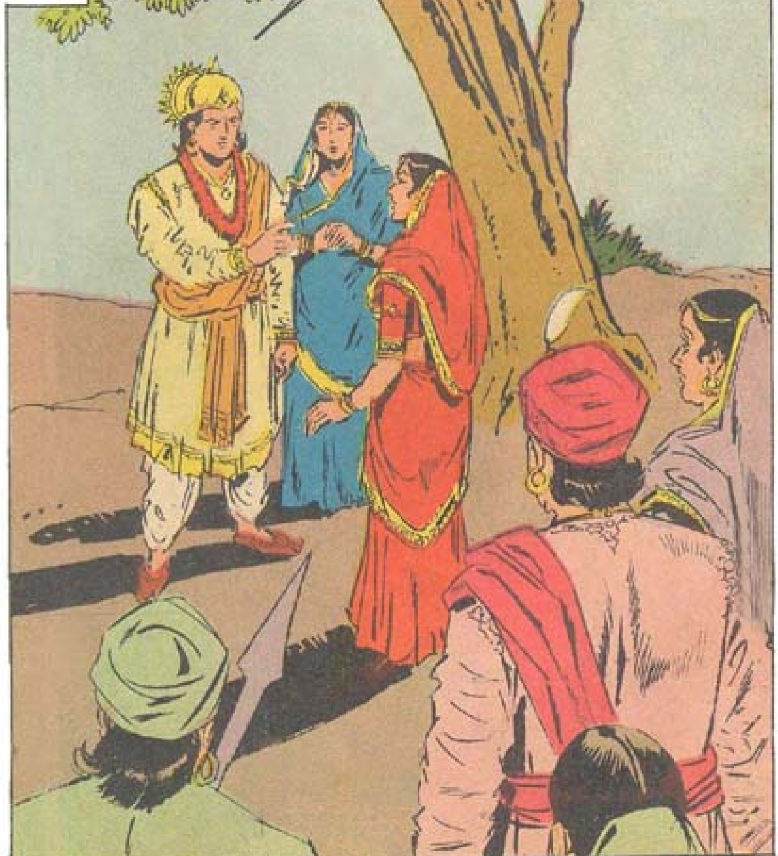

THE GUARDS GAVE NILANJANA A PUSH. BUT EVEN AS SHE FELL, TWO STRONG ARMS PROTECTED HER.


THE NEXT MOMENT NILANJANA FOUND HERSELF ON THE HILL AGAIN. A HANDSOME PRINCE WAS STANDING BESIDE HER.
NILANJANA, I AM THE RAINBOW PRINCE.


THE RAINBOW PRINCE ! OUR PRINCESS WILL BE DELIGHTED. AT LAST HER PRINCE HAS COME FOR HER !


RUPANJALI CAME FORWARD.
AH, MY PRINCE! I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.


AND TORTURING INNOCENT BIRDS FOR YOUR SELFISH ENDS !



THEN THE PRINCE TOOK OFF HIS GARLAND AND STEPPED FORWARD.

I AM THE RED PARROT! AND I BELONG TO YOU, NILANJANA.

NO! SHE IS ONLY A MAID. I AM THE PRINCESS YOU ARE LOOKING FOR....

IGNORING RUPANJALI, THE RAINBOW PRINCE GARLANDED NILANJANA.

YOU ARE MY QUEEN. I TOOK THE FORM OF THE RED PARROT ONLY TO TEST THE WORTH OF THE GIRL I WOULD CHOOSE TO MARRY.

CRUEL RUPANJALI IS A PRINCESS ONLY BY BIRTH. BUT YOU, MY KIND, BRAVE, LOYAL GIRL, ARE A PRINCESS AT HEART!

YOU GLOW WITH AN INNER BEAUTY. RUPANJALI'S BEAUTY IS ONLY SKIN-DEEP. COME, LET US GO TO THE LAND OF THE RAINBOW.

BUT THE BIRDS . . . IN THE CAGE . . . .

I HAVE ALREADY SET THEM FREE. LOOK!

I AM SO HAPPY!

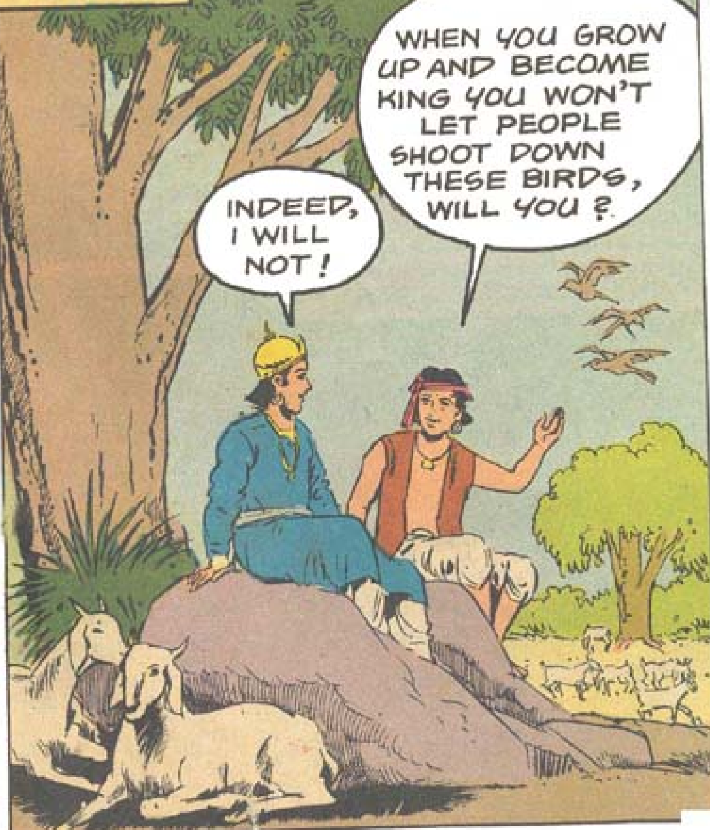
THEN THE PRINCE PLACED NILANJANA IN HIS GOLDEN CHARIOT AND SET OFF FOR THE LAND OF THE RAINBOW. RUPANJALI WAS LEFT BEHIND, A SADDER AND WISER GIRL.

IF ONLY YOU HAD BEEN A LITTLE MORE CONSI-DERATE, RUPANJALI. ANY-WAY, BE KIND AND GENTLE TO OTHERS IN FUTURE. THEN YOU ARE SURE TO FIND PEACE AND HAPPINESS.

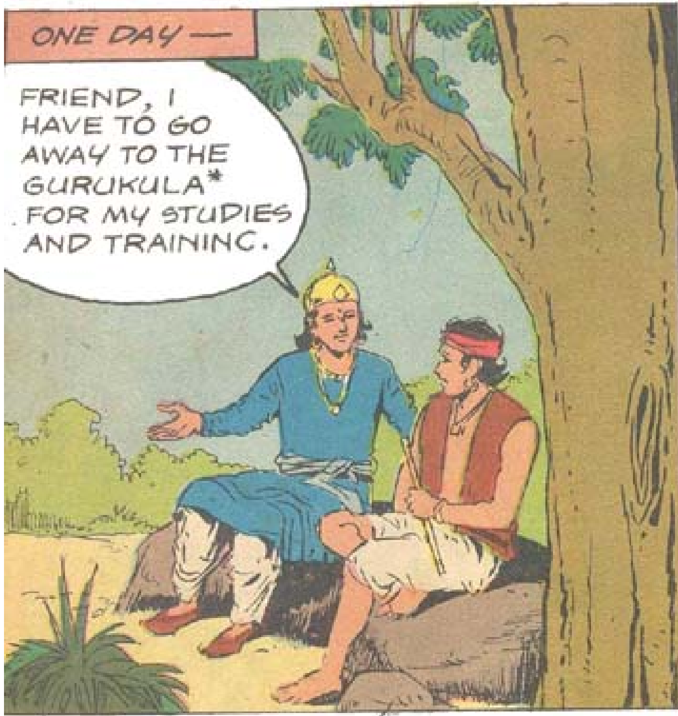
THE FAITHFUL SHEPHERD

THERE ONCE LIVED A PRINCE WHOSE BEST FRIEND WAS A SHEPHERD.

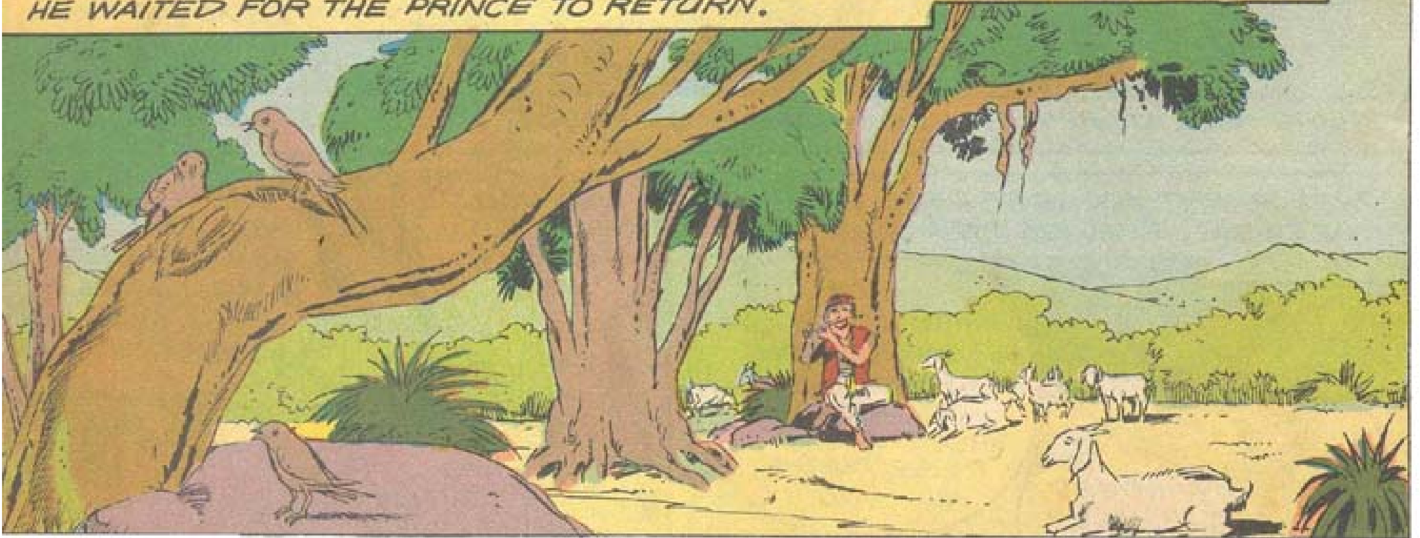
THEY SPENT A GREAT DEAL OF TIME TOGETHER, PLAYING AND ROMPING ABOUT.






ONE DAY —
FRIEND, I HAVE TO GO AWAY TO THE GURUKULA* FOR MY STUDIES AND TRAININC.


THE TWO FRIENDS BADE EACH OTHER FAREWELL.
COME BACK SOON, FRIEND. THE BROOK, THE HILL, THE BIRDS AND I WILL BE WAITING.

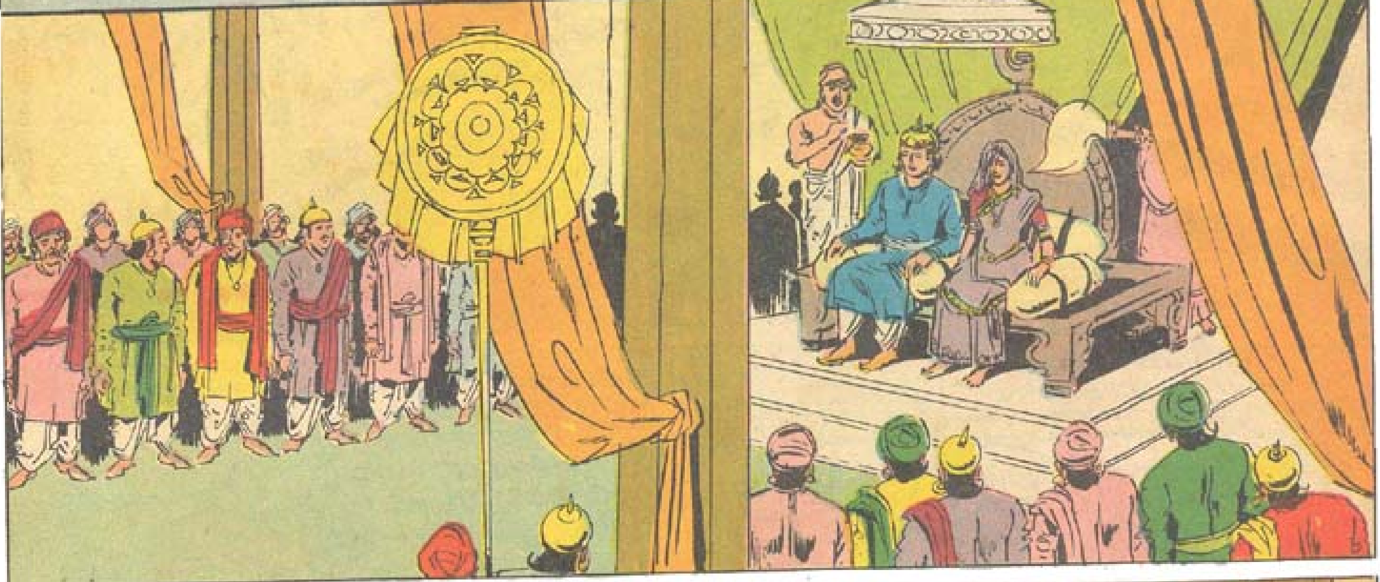

THE YEARS FLEW BY. THE SHEPHERD NEVER MADE ANOTHER FRIEND. HE WAITED FOR THE PRINCE TO RETURN.

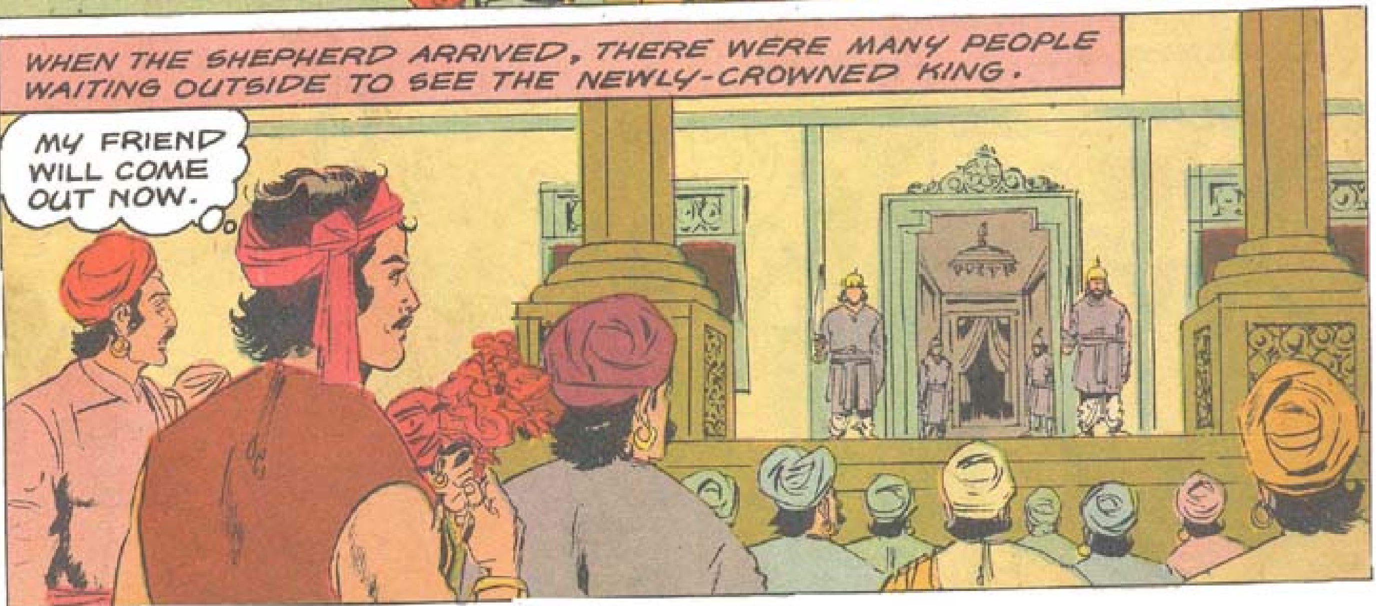

ONE DAY, AS THE SHEPHERD WAS TAKING HIS FLOCK HOME —
DON'T YOU KNOW YOUR FRIEND HAS RETURNED? HE IS TO WED PRINCESS KANAK MALA TOMORROW.
MY PRINCE HAS RETURNED! HE WILL SURELY COME AND VISIT ME SOON, JUST AS HE USED TO.

MANY MONTHS PASSED, BUT THE PRINCE DID NOT COME.

THE PRINCE MUST BE VERY BUSY. I WILL GO AND MEET HIM.



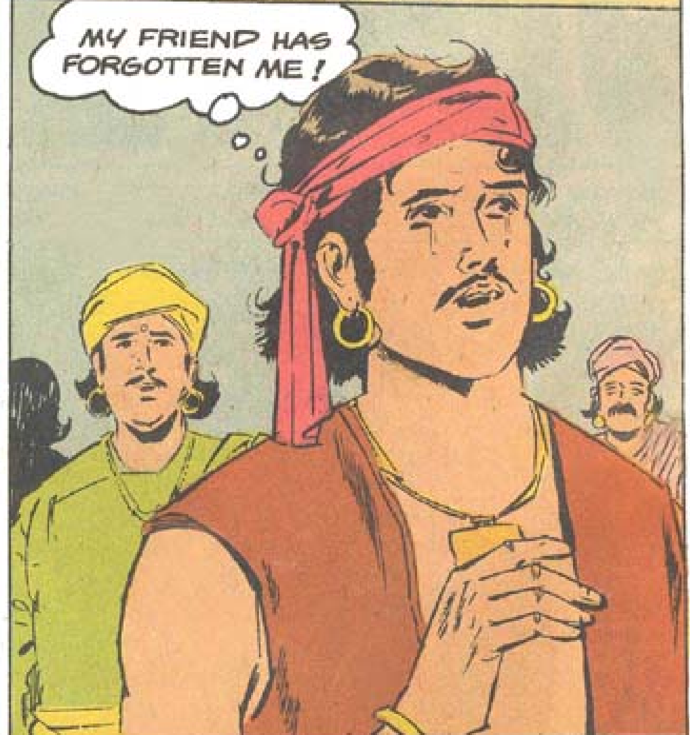


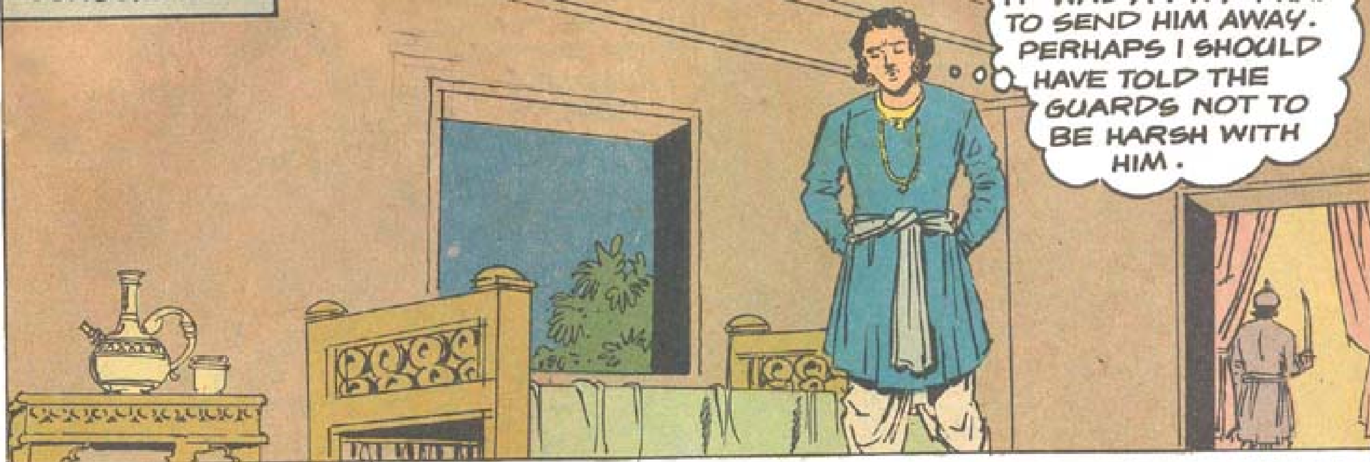


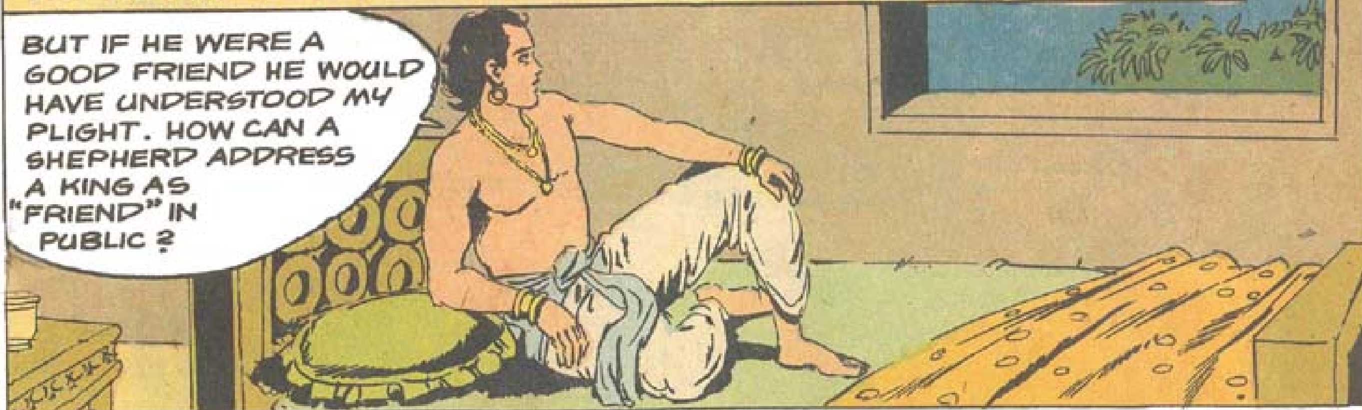

AFTER SOME TIME, THE KING CAME OUT. THE SHEPHERD QUICKLY STEPPED FORWARD.
FRIEND!
IT'S THE SHEPHERD! HE WISHES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A CHILDHOOD FRIENDSHIP. I MUST NOT ENCOURAGE HIM.


AND THE KING WALKED PAST THE SHEPHERD WITHOUT EVEN GLANCING AT HIM.
MY FRIEND! DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME ?


BUT THE GUARDS HELD THE SHEPHERD BACK.
QUIET! DON'T PESTER HIS MAJESTY!

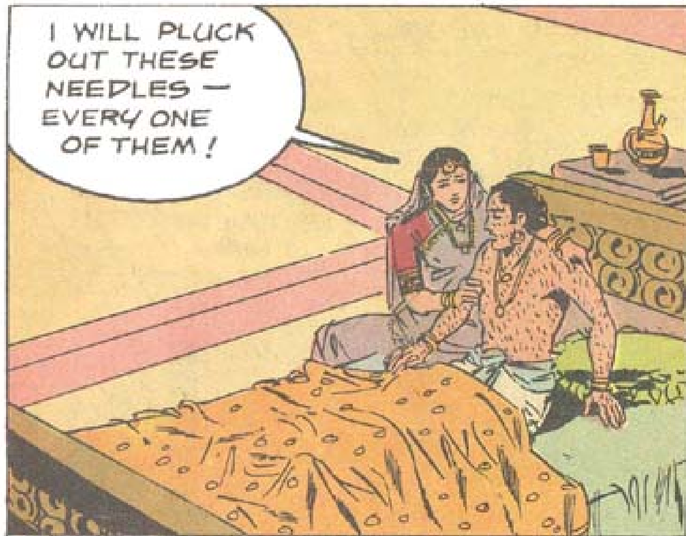

THE SHEPHERD WENT AWAY QUIETLY WITH TEARS IN HIS EYES.
MY FRIEND HAS FORGOTTEN ME!

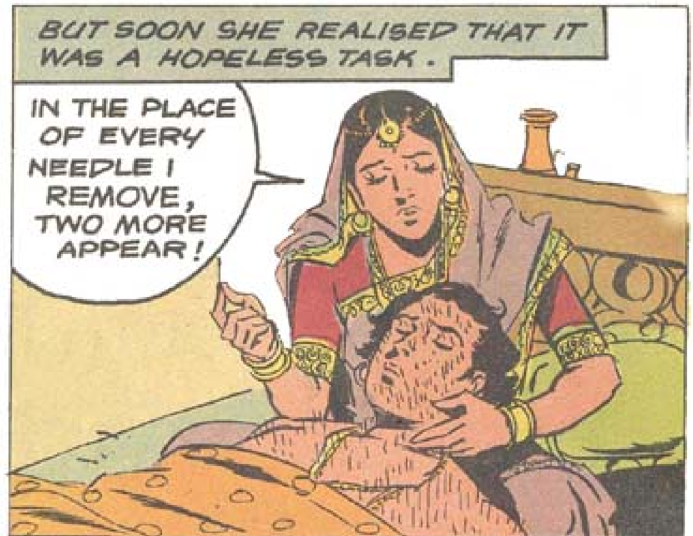

THAT NIGHT THE KING COULD NOT SLEEP. HE WAS TROUBLED BY HIS CONSCIENCE.
IT WAS A PITY I HAD TO SEND HIM AWAY. PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE TOLD THE GUARDS NOT TO BE HARSH WITH HIM.


BUT HE MANAGED TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF AND QUIETEN HIS CONSCIENCE.
BUT IF HE WERE A GOOD FRIEND HE WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD MY PLIGHT. HOW CAN A SHEPHERD ADDRESS A KING AS "FRIEND" IN PUBLIC ?

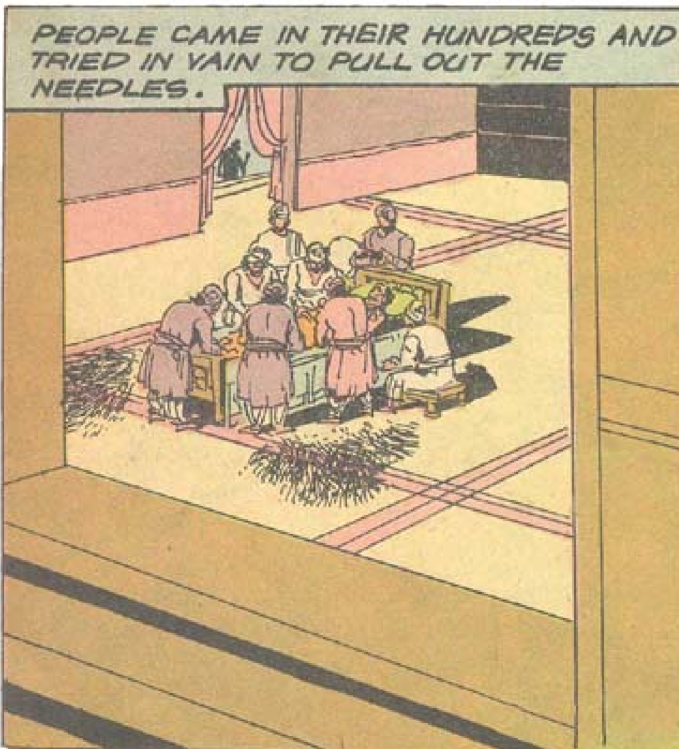

WHEN THE KING WOKE UP THE NEXT MORNING, HE FOUND HIS BODY COVERED WITH MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF NEEDLES.
AA...AAH... KANAK MALA !

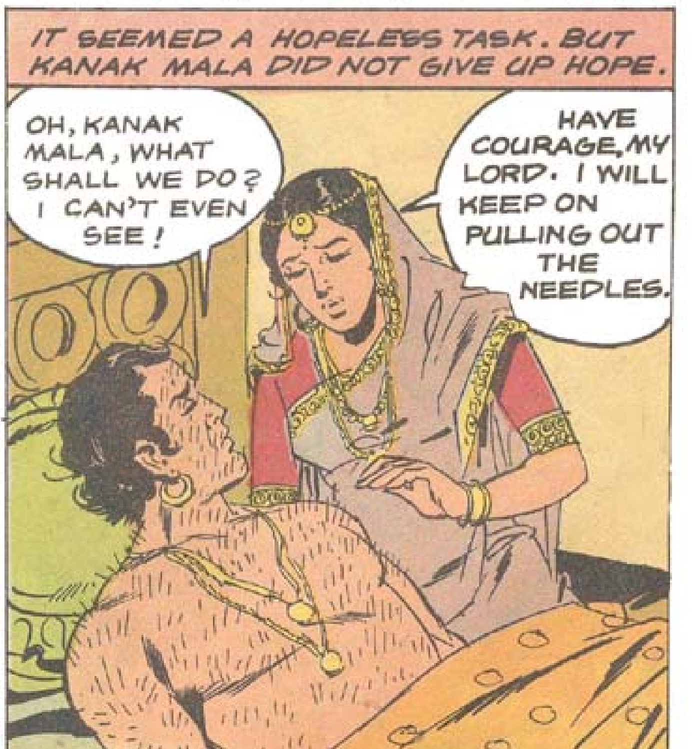

MY LORD !
I AM IN AGONY KANAK MALA. HELP ME !


I WILL PLUCK OUT THESE NEEDLES — EVERY ONE OF THEM !


BUT SOON SHE REALISED THAT IT WAS A HOPELESS TASK .
IN THE PLACE OF EVERY NEEDLE I REMOVE, TWO MORE APPEAR !

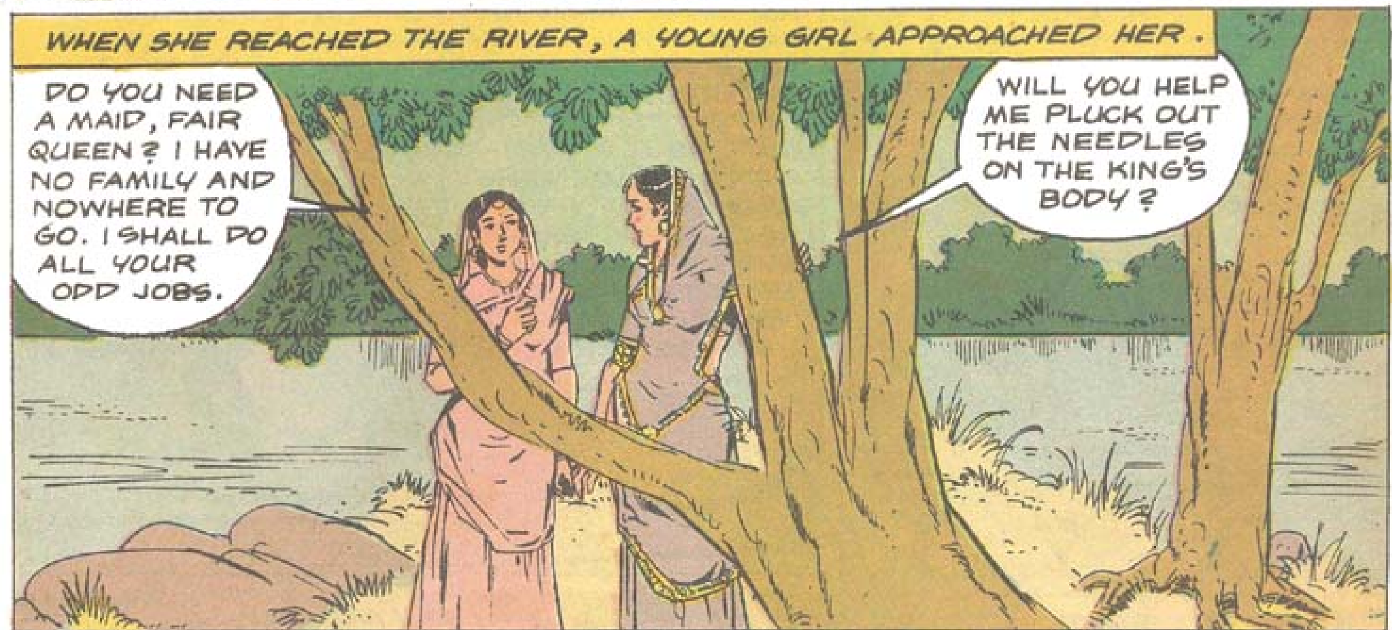

VERY SOON, THE ENTIRE KINGDOM CAME TO KNOW ABOUT THE KING'S PLIGHT.
THE KING'S BODY IS COVERED WITH NEEDLES !
HOW CAN WE HELP HIM ?

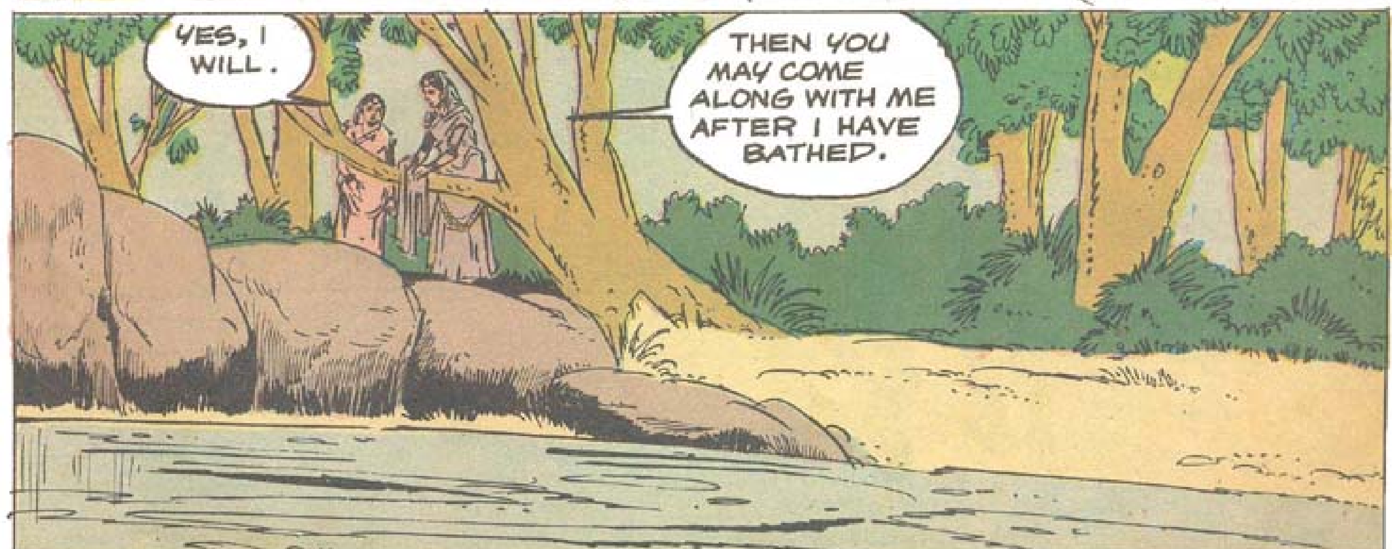

PEOPLE CAME IN THEIR HUNDREDS AND TRIED IN VAIN TO PULL OUT THE NEEDLES .


IT SEEMED A HOPELESS TASK. BUT KANAK MALA DID NOT GIVE UP HOPE.
OH, KANAK MALA, WHAT SHALL WE DO ? I CAN'T EVEN SEE !
HAVE COURAGE, MY LORD. I WILL KEEP ON PULLING OUT THE NEEDLES.


NO, YOUR HANDS MUST BE BATHED IN BLOOD. PLEASE TAKE SOME REST NOW.
I WON'T LEAVE YOUR SIDE, MY LORD.

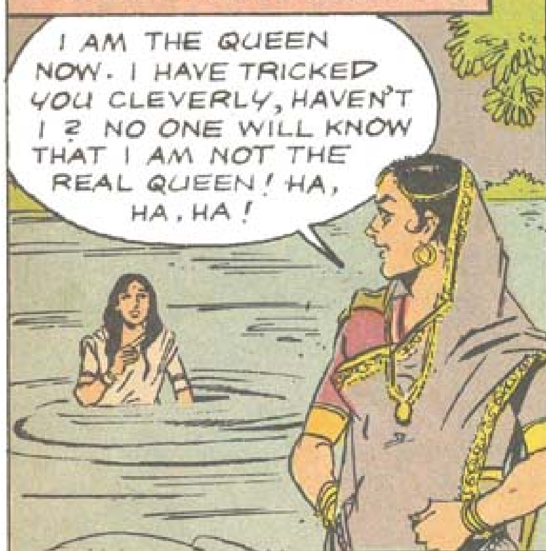

BUT THE KING INSISTED.
A DIP IN THE RIVER WILL REFRESH YOU. GO, KANAK MALA.


WHEN SHE REACHED THE RIVER, A YOUNG GIRL APPROACHED HER.
DO YOU NEED A MAID, FAIR QUEEN? I HAVE NO FAMILY AND NOWHERE TO GO. I SHALL DO ALL YOUR ODD JOBS.
WILL YOU HELP ME PLUCK OUT THE NEEDLES ON THE KING'S BODY?


YES, I WILL.
THEN YOU MAY COME ALONG WITH ME AFTER I HAVE BATHED.


KANAK MALA HAD JUST GONE INTO THE RIVER WHEN SHE HEARD AN ARROGANT VOICE.
BE QUICK, WOMAN! YOU'VE TO GET TO THE PALACE AND DO ALL MY ODD JOBS.


KANAK MALA LOOKED UP AMAZED.
WHAT! HOW DARE YOU! PUT BACK MY CLOTHES AND ORNAMENTS!


THE GIRL ONLY LAUGHED.
I AM THE QUEEN NOW. I HAVE TRICKED YOU CLEVERLY, HAVEN'T I? NO ONE WILL KNOW THAT I AM NOT THE REAL QUEEN! HA, HA, HA!

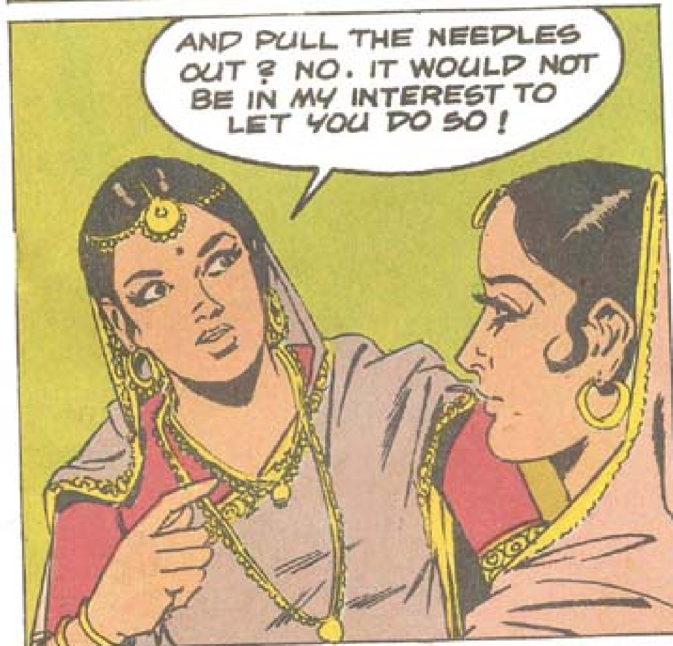

AS KANAK MALA WAS A BRIDE, SHE USUALLY WORE A VEIL. ONLY THREE PERSONS COULD HAVE RECOGNISED THE OTHER GIRL TO BE AN IMPOSTOR.
BUT THE OLD KING AND THE QUEEN ARE AWAY ON A PILGRIM-AGE. MY HUSBAND'S EYES ARE SEWN UP WITH NEEDLES! WHO ELSE CAN EXPOSE HER?


BUT I WILL GO TO THE PALACE AS HER MAID. I MUST BE NEAR MY HUSBAND. HE NEEDS ME.
WHY ARE YOU WASTING TIME? COME OUT OF THE RIVER QUICKLY.

BUT ON REACHING THE PALACE THE IMPOSTOR LOCKED THE DOOR TO THE KING'S ROOM.

YOU CANNOT GO INSIDE.

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO SERVE MY LORD.







KANAK MALA PRICKED UP HER EARS.

WHO IS SINGING ABOUT NEEDLES ? HOW I DREAD THAT WORD!

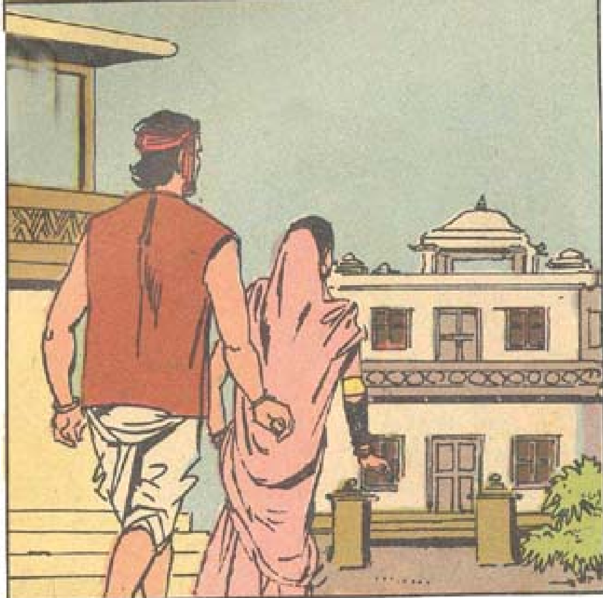
IF I HAD A MILLION NEEDLES I WOULD DANCE AND SING. IF I HAD A BILLION NEEDLES...

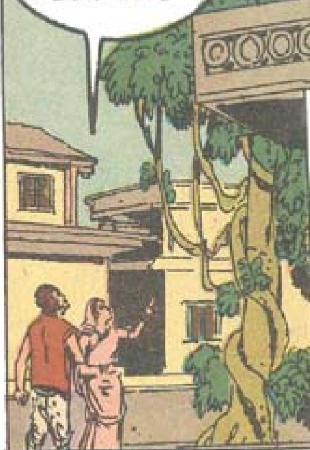
KANAK MALA GOT UP AND LOOKED AROUND FOR THE SINGER.

.. I WOULD BE A KING!

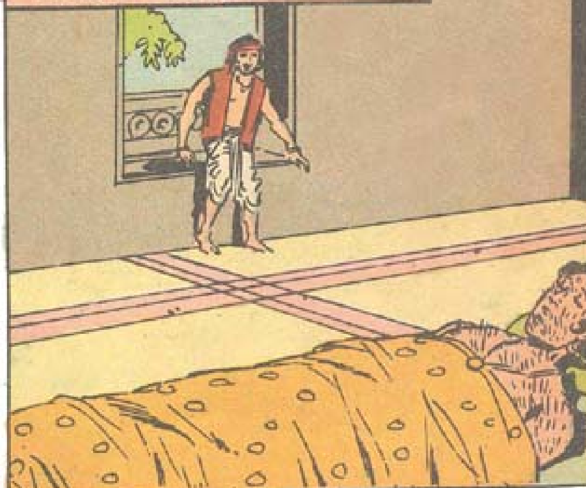
AH! THERE HE IS!

DO YOU REALLY WANT A BILLION N EDLES ? IF YOU ARE WILLING TO PLUCK THEM OUT YOURSELF, YOU CAN HAVE THEM. COME, FOLLOW ME.

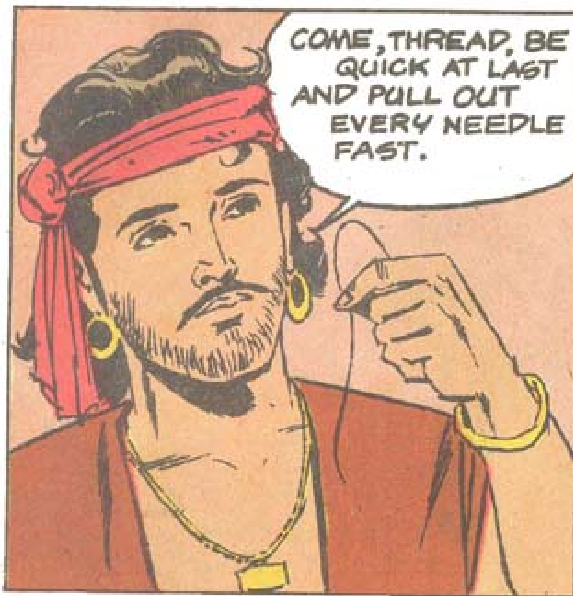

THE SINGER SILENTLY FOLLOWED KANAK MALA TO THE PALACE.

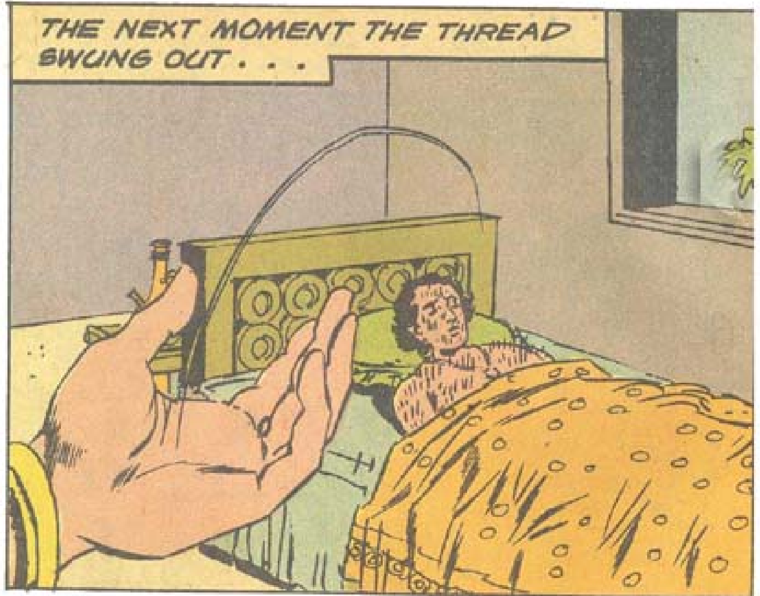

CAN YOU GET IN THROUGH THE WINDOW? THE KING IS LOCKED IN THAT ROOM. HIS BODY IS FULL OF NEEDLES.


THE SINGER BEGAN TO CLIMB A NEARBY TREE...

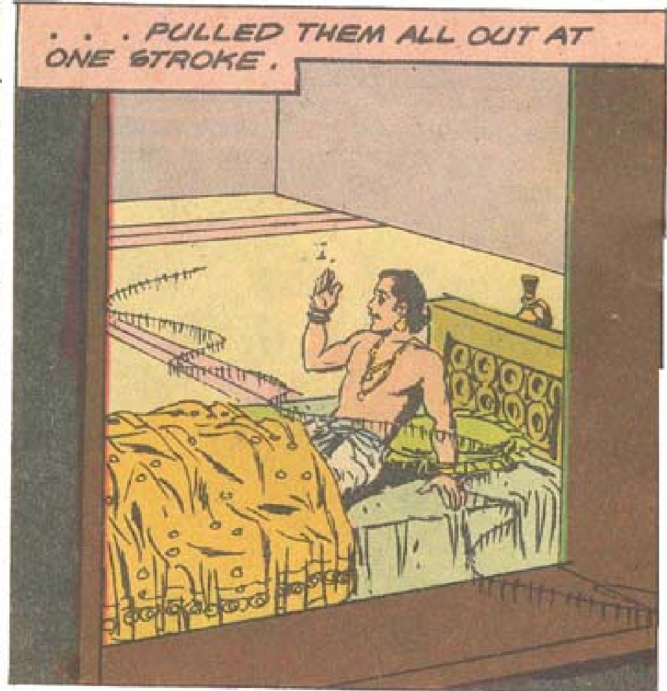

...AND ENTERED THE KING'S ROOM.


INSIDE THE ROOM, THE SINGER TOOK OUT A THREAD FROM HIS POCKET AND BEGAN TO CHANT.
WICKED NEEDLES, MOVE OFF, DO!


COME, THREAD, BE QUICK AT LAST AND PULL OUT EVERY NEEDLE FAST.


THE NEXT MOMENT THE THREAD SWUNG OUT . . .


. . . AND THREADING ITSELF THROUGH THE EYES OF THE NEEDLES . . .


. . . PULLED THEM ALL OUT AT ONE STROKE.


MY FRIEND! YOU HAVE SAVED MY LIFE!

THE KING EMBRACED THE SINGER, WHO WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE SHEPHERD.

HOW HAPPY I AM TO SEE YOU AGAIN!

DO YOU REMEMBER ME THEN?

I SHALL NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF FOR HAVING FORGOTTEN YOU.

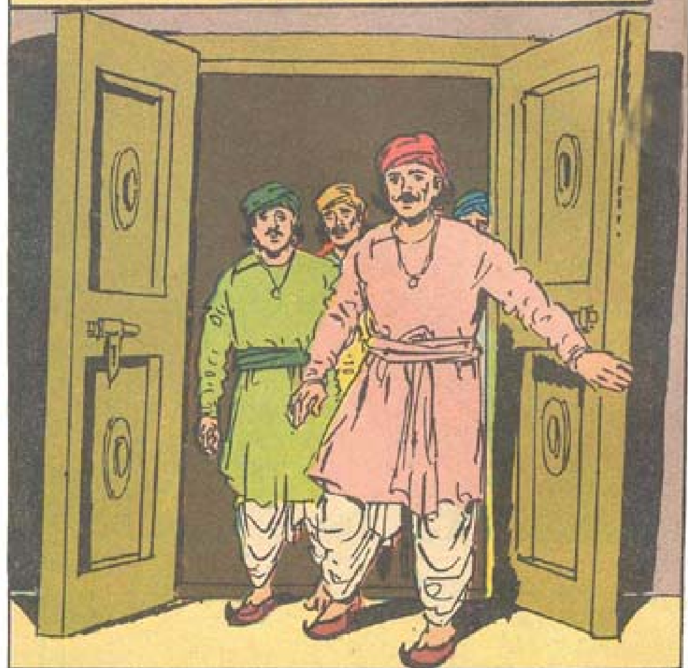
TELL ME, WAS IT YOU WHO PUNISHED ME WITH THESE NEEDLES?

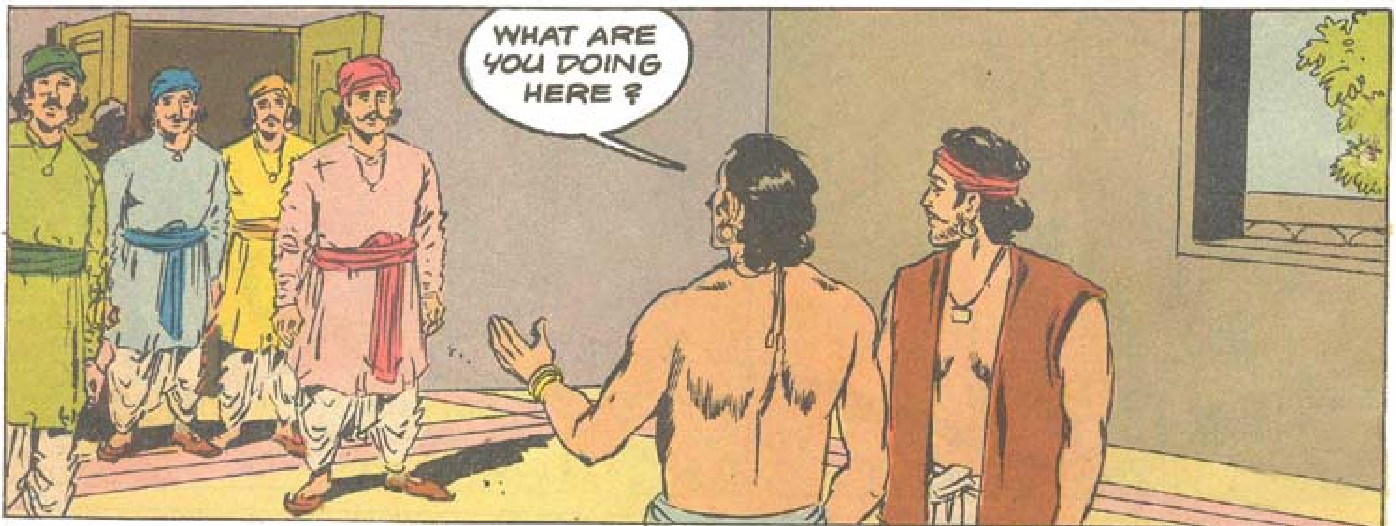
NO, NEVER! I AM YOUR FRIEND. HOW COULD I HURT YOU?

IT WAS YOUR OWN CONSCIENCE WHICH PUNISHED YOU. THEN DESTINY TOOK A HAND, TURNING THE PRICKS OF YOUR CONSCIENCE INTO ACTUAL NEEDLES.

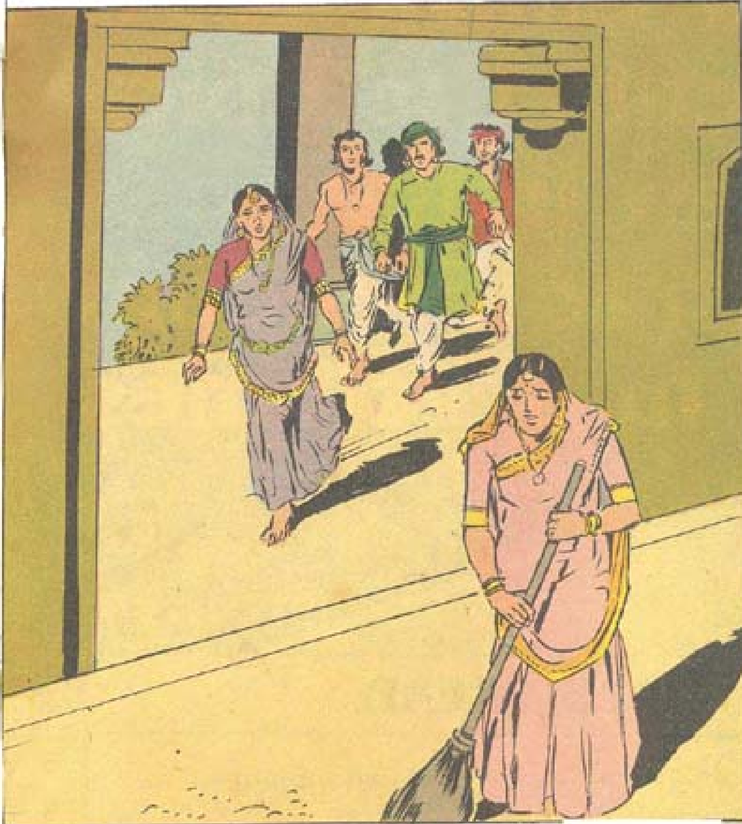
I DESERVED IT ALL! AND I AM HAPPY THAT THE SAME DESTINY BROUGHT YOU AGAIN TO MY RESCUE!

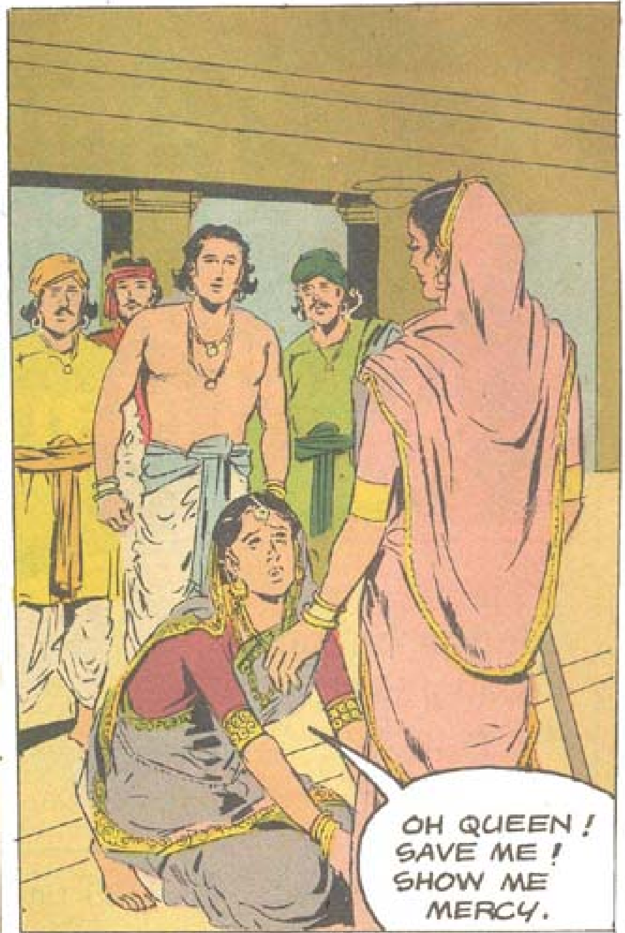

MEANWHILE THE COURTIERS WERE PUZZLED TO FIND THE KING'S DOOR LOCKED.
HOW STRANGE! LET US BREAK OPEN THE LOCK AND FIND OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING.

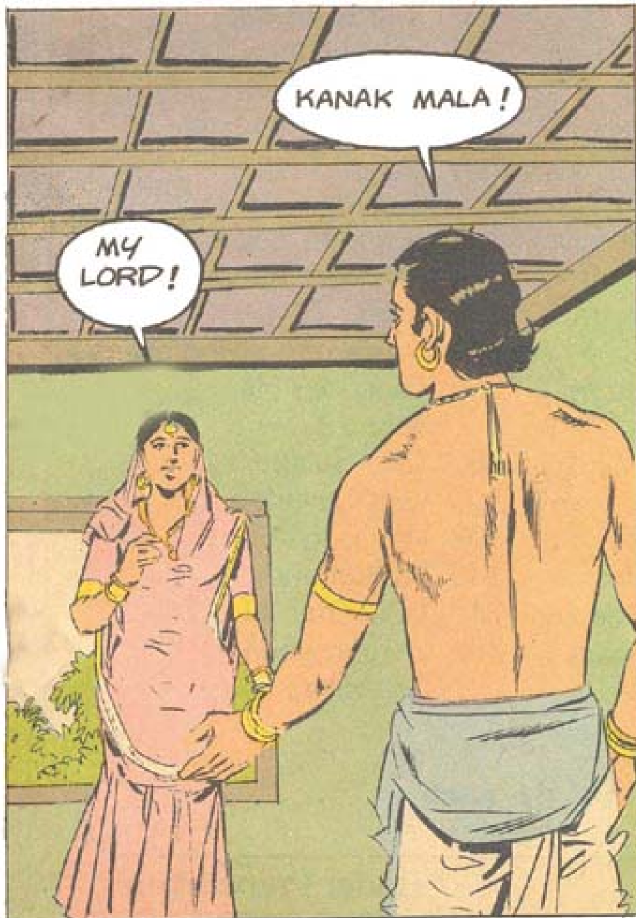

THEY MANAGED TO OPEN THE DOOR AND ENTER THE ROOM.

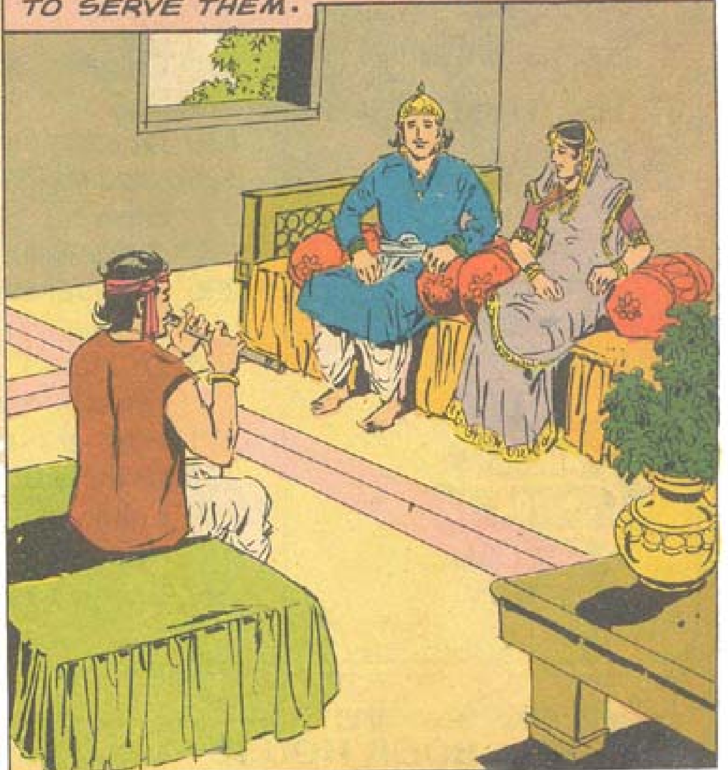

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE ?


HEARING THE NOISE, THE IMPOSTOR CAME RUNNING IN —
WHO ARE YOU ? WHERE IS MY QUEEN ? BRING HER TO ME AT ONCE !


TREMBLING ALL OVER, THE IMPOSTOR WENT TO FETCH KANAK MALA. THE KING AND THE SHEPHERD FOLLOWED HER.


OH QUEEN! SAVE ME! SHOW ME MERCY.


KANAK MALA!
MY LORD!


THE WICKED IMPOSTOR WAS BANISHED FROM THE KINGDOM AND THE KING AND QUEEN LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER, WITH THE FAITHFUL SHEPHERD TO SERVE THEM.